OPINION

OPINION: Not every elected president gets a chance at an address

STEVE CORONELLA | FOR WHAT IT'S WORTH

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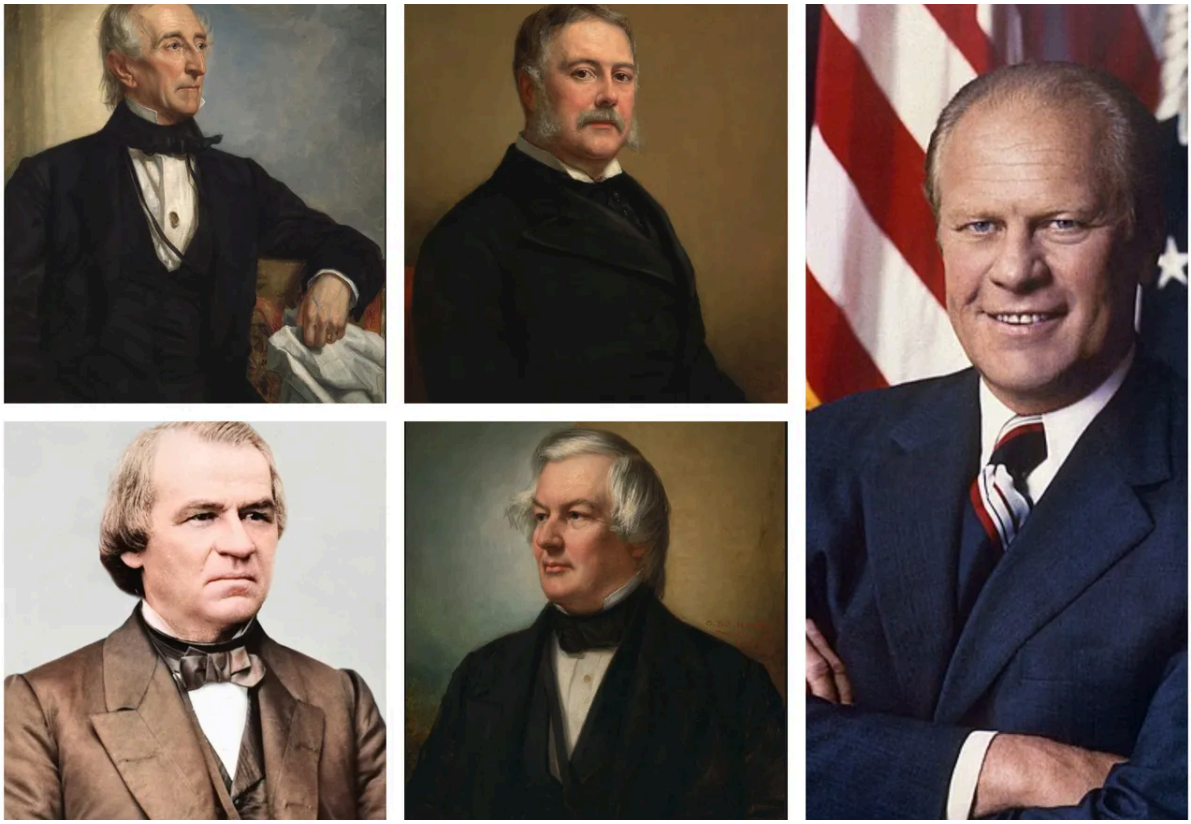

What do U.S. presidents, clockwise from top left, John Tyler, Chester A. Arthur, Gerald Ford, Millard Fillmore and Andrew Johnson all have in common? Check out the column below for the answer. COURTESY PHOTOS/WIKIPEDIA

As Donald Trump is sworn in for a second time, spare a thought U.S. presidents denied an inaugural address.

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On Jan. 20, Donald Trump will be sworn in as the 47th U.S. president and thus become only the second commander-in-chief to serve non-consecutive terms, joining Grover Cleveland, also New York-raised and the first Democratic nominee elected after the Civil War.

Who knows what the world will hear.

Over the years, however, the words of some incoming presidents have sparkled sufficiently to become a benchmark for such speeches today.

For instance, Abraham Lincoln's incredibly brief 700-word Second Inaugural Address – delivered on March 4, 1865, with the surrender of the insurgent Confederacy only weeks away – famously concluded in part: "With malice toward none, with charity for all...let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds..."

And of course, aided by television and his Hollywood good looks, John F. Kennedy employed perhaps the occasion's most memorable phrasing in his January 1961 Inaugural Address.

Against a backdrop of deep snow and sunshine, with his words billowing out in the frosty 20 degree air, Kennedy proclaimed: "And so, my fellow Americans: ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country."

As I discovered on a recent visit to Washington D.C., however, not every U.S. president has enjoyed this ceremonial perk.

I unearthed this glittering historical nugget in the White House gift shop. While investigating a two-volume set containing the Inaugural Addresses of America's various chief executives, I came across a page listing presidents who never got the chance to deliver any introductory

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(I took a photo of the names, determined to quiz friends and family on the subject when I returned home – whether they were amenable or not.)

So who are these supreme office holders snubbed by historical circumstance?

Well, it's best to begin by considering the straightforward conditions whereby a U.S. president might be denied the privilege of an inaugural address, namely, the succession to office of a vice-president upon the death or incapacity of the sitting president and a subsequent failure to acquire the top job by popular decree in the next election.

It might also be helpful to consider the historical oddity that every president elected at 20-year intervals from 1840 to 1960 died in office. (Franklin Delano Roosevelt did indeed die in 1945, but he was elected in 1940 – as well as in 1932, 1936, and 1944. Ronald Reagan broke the string of fallen statesmen – he was elected to his first term in 1980 – although he was the target of an unsuccessful assassination attempt in 1981.)

This narrows down the field considerably. Two names are obvious – at least to those with a better than superficial grasp of U.S. history – as the men in question assumed the presidency following a seismic event. (In political terms anyway.)

When Abraham Lincoln was assassinated in April 1865, shortly after making his timeless speech, Andrew Johnson took charge of a shattered republic.

Approaching the election of 1868, however, he failed even to receive his party's nomination, losing out to New York governor Horatio Seymour, who was beaten in the general election by Civil War supremo Ulysses S. Grant.

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So no inaugural address for Johnson.

Likewise, in August 1974, one-time House Minority Leader Gerald Ford assumed the presidency upon the still singular resignation of Richard Nixon. (Curiously, Ford had been appointed vice president by Nixon following the resignation of his original running mate Spiro Agnew in October 1973 due to a tax evasion scandal.)

Ford received the Republican nomination for president in 1976, but lost in the general election to Democratic candidate Jimmy Carter.

So no high-minded speechifying for Ford either.

The remaining three presidents who never got to deliver an inaugural address are best known for their relative obscurity – if that makes any sense. Unfortunate enough to govern owing to the death of the country's preferred presidential choice, as well as during an overlooked period of U.S. history, the names of these men are guaranteed to elude even the most fervent trivia fan.

In fact, if I didn't have the names recorded on my phone, I'd struggle to list them. (Spoiler: They are John Tyler, Millard Fillmore, and Chester A. Arthur.)
Goes to show that history can be unkind, especially to three unsung U.S. presidents who never got a traditional welcome into the job.

Medford native (and Winchester wannabe) Steve Coronella has lived in Ireland since 1992. He is the author of "Designing Dev," a comic novel about an Irish-American lad from Boston who's recruited to run for the Irish presidency. His latest publication is the column collection "Entering Medford – And Other Destinations."

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OPINION

Salvation Army thanks Winchester for Red Kettle Campaign support

To the Editor: As we begin 2026, The Salvation Army Massachusetts Division would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to the residents, businesses, and volunteers in the Winchester area who supported the 2025 Red Kettle Campaign. Your generosity and kindness during the holiday season brought comfort, hope, and tangible support

February 10, 2026

OPINION

Yes, Virginia...There is a Santa Claus

Editor's Note: Francis P. Church's editorial, "Yes Virginia, There is a Santa Claus" first appeared in The New York Sun in 1897, and was reprinted annually until 1949 when the paper went out of business. When it first appeared, it was an immediate sensation, and became one of

December 25, 2025

OPINION

'Lights of Love' in Winchester looking for donations this holiday season

Dear friends and supporters: My husband and I founded the "Lights of Love" –

OPINION

The return of the winter paunch is nothing to worry about — Just ask any squirrel

Over the past couple of wee familiar seasonal sighting around our Dublin

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Winchester in 2004. For more than two decades, the “Lights of Love” has illuminated our Town Center and downtown area all year round – a glowing tribute in memory of our deceased children, family members and friends whose

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house. The object in question usually appears when I’m stepping into the shower or getting ready for bed, and it’s a 100% reliable sign that summer and autumn have ended and colder

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December 1, 2025

Latest

EVENTS

Celebrate Women’s History Month with Girls Leading Change

The following was submitted by the Network for Social Justice: To mark Women’s History Month and International Women’s Day in 2026, the Network for Social Justice is collaborating with club leaders from Winchester High School and members of the Community Health team from La Colaborativa in Chelsea and

March 4, 2026

NEWS

Winchester School Committee candidates bring contrasting backgrounds to Thursday forum

Two candidates for Winchester’s School Committee will face voters at a forum as the district navigates a new literacy curriculum, budget pressures and questions about student mental health. Heather von Mering and John Bellaire are competing for an open seat on the School Committee, which oversees a budget von

WILL DOWD | STAFF WRITER

March 4, 2026

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FEATURES

‘Chicago: Teen Edition’ dances onto the Winchester High School stage

By Talia Ho | Correspondent Fame. Fortune. And all that jazz. This spring, Winchester High School presents “Chicago: Teen Edition,” a bold musical that explores celebrity culture, media manipulation, and the cost of ambition. This iconic production is set in the 1920s. Performances will take place on March 13 and 14

SPECIAL TO THE NEWS
March 4, 2026

EVENTS

Ripley Chapel in Winchester presents ‘Syldason: You Are Welcome Here’

The following was submitted by the Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church: On Friday, March 13, beginning at 7:30 p.m., live in-person and live streamed from the stunning Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church, Winchester, 21 Church St., join in with Syldason, a duo concert featuring Sylvie Zakarian,

March 4, 2026

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